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ABSTRACT

Education can help eliminate prejudice and form ethical attitudes. Unfortunately, education is not always such a positive force. Today, many majority youngsters leave our schools with excellent mathematics and reading skills, but with attitudes of racial bias and hatred that grossly contrast with democratic ideals. At the same time, we allow many minority youngsters to leave our schools without the quality education and meaningful skills they need. Many of these young people leave school as dropouts or pushouts, very bitter and disillusioned. There are several key factors, however, that can help majority youth assess their view toward racial and lower income minorities. These same factors may be instrumental in helping minority youth reassess their self-image, self-dignity and essential worth. This paper focuses on: (1) the concept of neutrality or objectivity as it affects those in our society who would be advocates for social change; (2) the role of the educational environment in reshaping academic achievement; and, (3) the very significant role that teacher attitudes can play in fostering academic achievement. The initial focus is on the consequences of mideducation: Examining the forces of advocacy, environment and attitudes, we may discover ways to eliminate disillusionment and discontent. (Author/JM)

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Significant and Unique Problems Facing Blacks in American Education

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ROBERT L. GREEN

What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all of its children. Any other idea for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon, it destroys our democracy.[1]

John Dewey

In 1899 John Dewey set the above standard for public education and in 1973 it still has important implications for educators. Education can be one of the most vital forces in our nation, playing a potent and positive role in shaping the lives of youngsters. It can help us eliminate prejudice and form ethical attitudes toward each other.

Unfortunately, education is not always such a positive force. Today, many *majority* youngsters leave our schools with excellent mathematics and reading skills, but with attitudes of racial bias and hatred that grossly contrast with democratic ideals. At the same time, we allow many *minority* youngsters to leave our schools without the quality education and meaningful skills they need to become contributing members of society. Many of these young people leave school as dropouts or pushouts, very bitter and disillusioned.

1. John Dewey, *The School and Society*, rev. ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1943).

American schools have not become a positive force in modifying and shaping children's attitudes and behavior in a democratic direction. There are several key factors, however, that can help majority youth assess their view toward racial and lower income minorities. These same factors may be instrumental in helping minority youth reassess their self-image, self-dignity and essential worth. This afternoon I will focus on:

1. the concept of neutrality or objectivity as it affects those in our society who would be advocates for social change;
2. the role of the educational environment in reshaping academic achievement; and
3. the very significant role that attitudes can play in fostering academic achievement.

But first let's focus on the consequences of miseducation. I am speaking of the consequences we will pay if we fail to implement meaningful change in our educational programs; I am speaking of the disillusionment, frustration and violence which often results from miseducation.

We need not accept these consequences. Education can play a meaningful role in facilitating the life chances of economically disadvantaged youngsters. It may help the many children who are put at a disadvantage by the broader society because of their racial or ethnic status. Examining the forces of advocacy, environment and attitudes, we may discover ways to eliminate disillusionment and discontent.

Scholarly Neutrality

Throughout my undergraduate and graduate training, time and time again, I was told that one should strive to become an objective, neutral scholar. In particular, I remember one of my graduate instructors, an outstanding scholar, telling me, "Don't study blacks because you cannot be neutral and objective." It took me some time to understand the implications of that statement. Practically, it meant, "Let non-black scholars study blacks." Unfortunately, the study and assessment of black problems and conditions by the non-black scholarly community have been exploitative.

> A cursory review of the literature readily supports the view that much past research on community groups, particularly poor people and minorities, has been descriptive. Furthermore, much

> research has failed to provide clear-cut program recommendations that would directly benefit the researched. Many researchers have believed their role was to define and describe the problems rather than to develop programs designed to alleviate them.[2]

Thus, scholarly objectivity does little to alleviate problems. Yet, when I was in graduate school, the doctrine was preached religiously. Today, it is still being taught.

One of the first things I learned in graduate school was the importance of research tools. I learned how to use the Analysis of Variance statistical technique with unequal "N's" in cells; I learned when to use a T-Test instead of the Chi-Square method; I was also taught how to interpret a statistical test of significance. In other words, I was taught the importance of research tools, and not the importance of applying them to human-social problems. Rather than ends in themselves, these research methods should provide the means for finding ways to cope with human-social problems. It is the coping, the understanding and the solving of human problems that are important; yet I was not taught this. At the close of my graduate studies, I set out to be a "good, neutral scholar."

My first research assignment placed me in Prince Edward County, Virginia, facing 1700 black youngsters who had been denied schooling for four years.[3] These eight-, nine- and ten-year-olds had never been inside a public school because the all-white county Board of Supervisors voted to close those schools rather than obey the law and desegregate them. The schools were closed from 1959-1963.[4]

With a U.S. Office of Education grant, and working closely with the Justice Department, a research team under my direction went into Prince Edward County to assess the achievement level of these black youngsters. I quickly saw the relationship between low achievement levels and the many disparaging social conditions in the community. Blacks in that community were preoccupied with

2. Robert L. Green and Lawrence W. Lezotte, "Unresolved Issues in Community-Based Research," *Journal of Non-White Concerns*, April 1973.

3. Robert L. Green, Louis J. Hofmann, Richard L. Morse, Marilyn E. Hayes and Robert F. Morgan, *The Educational Status of Children in a District Without Public Schools*, Cooperative Research Project No. 2321, U.S. Office of Education, Department of Health, Education and Welfare, 1964.

4. Robert L. Green, Louis J. Hofmann, Richard L. Morse and Robert F. Morgan, *The Educational Status of Children During the First School Year Following Four Years of Little or No Schooling*, Cooperative Research Project No. 2498, U.S. Office of Education, Department of Health, Education and Welfare, October 1966.

earning a living, with survival. Many black youngsters were told that completing high school would lead to a better style of life; yet they saw that blacks who had completed high school were doing no better in their community than blacks who had left school at the fifth grade. These black youngsters knew that black college graduates who returned to Prince Edward County could teach school—if they were lucky. If not, they were forced to be janitors or maids. There were no other alternatives for them in the community simply because they were black Americans. Thus, many Prince Edward County youngsters were preoccupied, not only with formal education, but also with the many aspects of society that education should, but did not, touch.

Our research team saw a need to develop programs to boost the achievement levels of children once the public schools were reopened. At the same time, however, we could not overlook the social conditions that were tearing apart the black community.

In short, I found myself, the "neutral scholar," helping to print leaflets and marching in demonstrations during the evenings. I found that I could not study this community and disengage myself from the brutal racial discrimination facing blacks. In the stores, black women were forbidden to try on dresses before buying them. White children were allowed to get a drink of water in a drug store but black children were not. What was the meaning of describing these degrading conditions and not working to change them?

In one particular case, Ivanhoe Donaldson, a member of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, asked me to march with him and a group of youngsters into a cafeteria that refused to serve blacks. He and I and 16 young people bravely walked into the cafeteria. We sat down, were refused service, and politely left. I had just received a grant from the U.S. Office of Education and I knew that by getting involved, I risked losing it. Many of my professional counterparts were not impressed with my involvement in social issues. Yet, I felt it was imperative to be able to engage in research and participate in non-violent activities leading to social change. And there was something else that was more important to me than that research grant. I wanted to be able to say to my sons later in life that the greatest fear then, and the greatest fear always, is the fear of not standing up for what is right.

There was another man in Prince Edward County, who, I believe, would agree with me. He was one of the only white people in the county who publicly opposed closing the public schools. He never wavered from his position throughout the long controversy. His

job was threatened; he was snubbed on the streets; people refused to sit next to him in church.

Gordon Moss, a scholar who later became Dean of Longwood College, originally based his opposition on his belief that public education was fundamental to America's national strength. Later, Moss strengthened his opposition. In his words:

> . . . I have insisted that my opposition was based upon my belief in democracy, and that in democracy you cannot have second-class citizens.
>
> And, . . . I based my opposition, and insisted that it be so recognized, on Christianity—on the principle that Christianity forbade the mistreatment of any subordinate group in the society.[5]

To defy Gordon Moss, the Prince Edward County citizens had to deny the basic principles of public education, democracy and Christianity. Yet they did defy him.

When the public schools were closed in 1959, Gordon Moss refused to send his son to the private white academy which replaced them. In 1963, when contributions from foundations and private citizens established the Prince Edward County Free School Association, Gordon Moss' son was one of the four white children who enrolled. Gordon Moss did not remain a neutral observer; he dared to take a stand on what was right.

Weber, Myrdal and Bunche

Thinking about this concept of scholarly neutrality vs. active involvement, I found three scholars, Max Weber, Gunnar Myrdal and Ralph Bunche, who had something to say about values in research and neutrality.

At the turn of the century, Max Weber, a German scholar of sociology, economics and legal history, was writing and lecturing in German universities on the role of values in social research. Two of his essays are "Objectivity in Social Science and Social Policy" and "The Meaning of 'Ethical Neutrality' in Sociology and Economics." Weber wrote that a researcher's—and I might add, an educator's—"cultural interests give purely empirical scientific work its direction . . . Hence the very recognition of the existence of a scientific problem"—or an educational problem—"coincides, personally,

5. Edgar A. Schuler and Robert L. Green, "Social Control and Non-Conformity in a Southern Town," Edgar A. Schuler, Thomas F. Hoult, Duane L. Gibson, Wilbur B. Brookover, Eds. *Readings in Sociology*, fourth edition (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1972).

with the possession of specifically oriented motives and values."[6] While many scholars were ardent proponents of the "neutral scholar" mode of research, Weber saw an inherent disservice to society when one covers his research with the cloak of neutrality.

Looking at that in terms of its implications for public education, we can readily support the view that no one in our society is objective and neutral regarding social reform and education. Teachers come to the classroom with a specific set of attitudes about such matters as life and death, crime, discipline, and, indeed, toward motivation and academic achievement. Therefore, teachers are not neutral. No one in our society is neutral about life and its many consequences.

Gunnar Myrdal and Ralph Bunche, who wrote in the '40's, give us further insight into the question of neutrality. Myrdal, a Swedish professor, is author of the monumental two-volume work, *The American Dilemma*, now a classic in social science literature. Bunche, who later became the first black Nobel Peace Prize winner, was Myrdal's research assistant. Some of his views are reflected in Myrdal's book. These men agree that scientists (and again I include the teacher and educator) are not immune to bias:

> In the light of the history of scientific writings on the 'American Negro problem,' the biased notions held in previous times and the opportunistic tendencies steering them stand out in high relief against the better controlled scientific views of today. Full objectivity, however, is an ideal toward which we are constantly striving, but which we can never reach. The social scientist, too, is part of the culture in which he lives, and he never succeeds in freeing himself entirely from dependence on the dominant preconceptions and biases of his environment.[7]

We can readily conclude that we are all to a great extent influenced by our past experiences. Our beliefs and attitudes are shaped by our environment.

I am who I am today because my father was born in Jones County, Georgia. He was raised in and around Milledgeville, Georgia, and then spent some time in Macon. I am who I am today because my father was a Pentecostal minister who believed and yet believes in a certain theology that had an impact on my life. I am who I am

6. Max Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, trans. and ed. by Edward A. Shils and Henry A. Finch (Illinois: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1949).

7. Gunnar Myrdal, "A Methodological Note on Facts and Valuation in Social Science," *An American Dilemma*, Vol. II (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1944, 1962 and 1969).

today because I grew up in an all black community in Detroit. I attended all black, or 90 percent black, elementary, junior high and high schools. I am who I am today because I served as an expert witness in several urban school desegregation suits. I was able to witness first hand how school systems deliberately participate and even initiate practices leading to inferior school systems for black children.

Between 1940 and 1960, the black population of the South increased 1.4 million. Due to migration during this period, the black population of the North increased 4.6 million.[8] However, northern school boards failed to place black migrants into the schools white children attended. Instead, they routed them into schools where black northerners had historically been contained.[9]

Data indicates that black youngsters were bused past all-white schools in Detroit twenty years ago to maintain and perpetuate racial segregation in the schools.[10] The people who bused those children twenty years ago are arguing *against* busing for racial balance today.

I now see clearly that northern school officials have been doing a much more effective job of maintaining school segregation than southern school officials. While southerners achieved segregation through legislation, northern educators relied on more subtle "de facto" means, such as residential segregation.

In the Detroit case, *Bradley vs. Milliken*, Judge Roth indicted all levels of government and public policy making for failing to live up to the ideals of a democratic society. He cited the school board's role in promoting school segregation through policies and practices that deliberately built on—rather than negated—segregated housing patterns. Roth further stated:

> The policies pursued by both government and private persons and agencies have a continuing and present effect upon the complexion of the community—as we know, the choice of a residence is a relatively unfrequent affair. For many years FHA and VA openly advised and advocated the maintenance of 'harmonious' neighborhoods, i.e., racially and economically harmonious. The conditions created continue. While it would be unfair to charge the present defendants with what other governmental officers or

8. Karl E. and Alma F. Taeuber, *Negroes in Cities* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1965).

9. Bradley, *et al.* v. Milliken, *et al.*, U.S. District Court (E.D. Michigan) Civil Action 35257, Sept. 27, 1971, "Ruling on Issue of Segregation."

10. *Ibid.*

agencies have done, it can be said that these actions or the failure to act by the responsible school authorities, both city and state, were linked to that of these other government units . . . And we note that just as there is an interaction between residential patterns and the racial composition of the schools, so there is a corresponding effect on the residential pattern by the racial composition of the schools.[11]

Advocacy

Because I have had the opportunity to study the social conditions plaguing black society and because I have had the chance to assess the needs of today's black community, I am what I am today—a black educator.

I believe that education is the force in American life that will help the black community overcome its problems and fulfill its needs. Hence, helping children succeed educationally is very important. We need to see that all black children receive the benefits of a good curriculum and good reading and math materials. Equally significant, however, are the behavior and attitudes of teachers and educators.

The main reason so many youngsters fail to succeed in school today is that there is no one to support them and to serve as an advocate for them in the classroom. We need more people like Gordon Moss, in Prince Edward County, Virginia, who will stand up and speak out for students who are being wronged.

During the past few years, teachers have been striking for better control of the teaching environment, a stronger voice in the selection of texts, and an increase in fringe benefits; but who has been serving as an advocate for young people? There were 145 teacher strikes throughout the nation in 1972. During the first few days of September 1973, an estimated 25,000 teachers walked out interrupting the education of 750,000 youngsters.[12] Recently in Detroit, 10,500 teachers struck.[13] According to *U.S. News and World Report*, more than 300 teachers went to jail in 1971 and 1972 for violating no-strike laws or court injunctions against strikes.[14]

11. *Ibid.*

12. "Back to School—and a Raft of Problems," *U.S. News and World Report*, September 17, 1973.

13. *Ibid.*

14. "Striking Teachers Find Rough Going," *U.S. News and World Report*, September 18, 1972.

I would like to ask this question—How many have gone to jail to protest discrimination against their students? How many are willing to go to jail because youngsters are achieving at very low levels throughout the country? No teacher who has recently gone on strike is as disadvantaged as the poor and minortiy children in his/her classroom.

Black educators can provide the leadership that is needed. Blacks have always been on the cutting edge of change in this country. Union efforts have not resulted in equal employment opportunity for blacks. White unionists have made great progress toward fair employment practices, yet they deny membership—and thus protection—to blacks. Unionism within our schools may have similar drawbacks if teachers only demand fairness for themselves and not for the children they teach.

The responsibility for positive social change lies with those of us who work in school districts and universities. What I am asking for and what I am pleading for is a new style of advocacy for youngsters in our schools.

Teacher Behavior and Educational Achievement

The first step in becoming advocates for poor and minority children is developing positive behavior toward them and a positive opinion of their academic potential.

I think the most injurious thing that has happened recently in American education is the attention given the research of Jencks,[15] Shockley[16] and Jensen[17]. These men mark as hopeless the plight of disadvantaged, underachieving youngsters, but current data indicates the opposite is true. This data supports the view that modifying the behavior of classroom teachers—in terms of teaching techniques, new strategies, or new material—modifies the behavior of youngsters in the classroom.[18] Yet Jensen and Jencks have

15. Christopher Jencks, *et al. Inequality: A Reassessment of the Effects of Family and Schooling in America* (New York, Basic Books, Inc., 1972).

16. William Shockley, "Possible Transfer of Metallurgical and Astronomical Approaches to the Problem of Environmental Versus Ethnic Heredity" *Science*, 1966.

17. Arthur R. Jensen, "How Much Can We Boost IQ and Scholastic Achievement?" *Harvard Educational Review*, 1969.

18. Charles E. Silberman, *Crisis in the Classroom* (New York: Random House, 1970).

greatly influenced the white community, arguing that the discrepancy in academic achievement, *mainly in terms of performance on standardized I.Q. tests,* is related to genetic factors.

A very interesting book is *Laggards in Our Schools,* written by Leonard P. Ayres in 1909. Ayres reports retardation rates of various ethnic groups in New York City schools as measured by standardized aptitude tests. German and American students top his list with the lowest retardation percentages. Irish and Italians are reported to be severely retarded. He states that local conditions in individual schools do not influence these retardation rates. Rather, he says, "the nationality factor is important and must be taken into account."[19] This implies that intelligence is somehow determined by accident of birth and not by any post natal environmental factors.

RETARDATION BY NATIONALITIES IN NEW YORK CITY[20]

Nationality	Percent Retarded
German	16
American	19
Mixed	19
Russian	23
English	24
Irish	29
Italian	36

Before anyone gives too much credence to Ayres or Jensen, Jencks and Shockley, he should look at all the facts. For example, a random sample of upper middle-class whites and poor whites in this country would probably show that the two groups differ significantly on aptitude test performance. We never report, however, that whites in the Appalachia area, for instance, are genetically inferior (intellectually) to whites in Skokie, Illinois.[21] Jensen himself points out that the offspring of immigrant Jews achieve higher I.Q. scores than the general population. He attributes this to prenatal or en-

19. Leonard P. Ayres, *Laggards in Our Schools* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1909).

20. *Ibid.*

21. Robert L. Green, "Environment and Educational Achievement: Implications for Head Start and Social Change," speech presented at National Head Start Conference, Los Angeles, California, November 4, 1969.

vironmental influences, not to genetics.[22] Jewish history shows us that the Jewish culture places great emphasis on scholarship.[23] Even today, male children are encouraged to study and enter a highly respected profession such as medicine, law or theology.

Similarly, Israeli government policy emphasizes education. Very strong programs are being implemented to provide equal educational opportunities for all Israeli children. Since Israeli immigrant children come from various backgrounds—European, American, Asian, African,—schools are sometimes faced with problems of social class discrimination and difficulties in coping with cultural differences.

For example, the Oriental or Sephardic Jews, who comprise about 40 percent of Israel's population, immigrate from the Middle East, Africa, Asia and India. Coming from non-industrialized, non-urbanized countries, they are, generally, unskilled and very poor. In contrast, Israel's Ashkenazi Jews come from Western Europe and America and thus are more attuned to the Western orientation of Israeli culture. They usually are better educated, hold better jobs and have less difficulty adjusting to the Israeli way of life.

When the children of these two groups of Jews are given standardized aptitude tests, the Ashkenazi children receive higher scores. Yet, Israeli educators have not taken the position that a genetic difference accounts for the variation in achievement levels. Instead, pre-school enrichment projects, tutoring programs and financial aid programs are used to assist in overcoming social, cultural and educational problems. Israel has also placed major emphasis on teacher training and attitudes.

Dvorah Susman, an Israeli researcher, studied the role of teacher attitude in the classroom experience. He concluded:

> The key to solving the problem [of the educationally disadvantaged child] is seen in the teacher's attitude and understanding, and the manner in which she adjusts teaching methods both to help the children grasp abstract concepts and to rehabilitate their thinking so that they will in the future be able to move from the concrete to the abstract without difficulty—teachers must be particularly alert to each child's reactions and must . . . display flexibility in improvising teaching methods which diverge from what they themselves have been taught.[24]

22. Jensen, *op. cit.*

23. Cecil Roth, *History of the Jews* (New York: Schocken Books, 1961).

24. Dvorah A. Susman, *A Study of Teacher Training, Focused on Increasing the Level of Abstract Thinking in Disadvantaged Children and the Establishment of a Service to Schools*, The NCJW Center for Research in the Education of the Disadvantaged.

More American teachers and educators should recognize the importance of positive behavior and attitudes and become aware of their responsibility in developing and fostering positive attitudes. The Israelis have taken the position that all children can learn. This is the stand that we, too, must take.

Teacher Attitude

In Prince Edward County, Virginia, black children were denied schooling for four years. When these children were placed in good schools and taught that they could learn to read, write and solve arithmetic problems, they learned very rapidly. Many increased their aptitude test performance by 15 to 20 points in a single year.[25] In these cases, teacher attitude was a key factor in the children's achievement gains.

Michael Palardy[26] dramatically reinforces my point. He looked at the long-held view that girls can learn to read more quickly than boys. Surveying more than 62 first grade teachers, he found five, just five, who believed that boys could learn to read as quickly as girls. Equating the two groups in terms of age, sex, ethnicity and classroom teaching experience, he paired those five teachers with another five who believed that girls could read more quickly than boys. Palardy found that boys could learn to read as quickly as girls if their teacher believed they could. When teachers believed that girls could learn faster, their girls indeed outshone the boys in terms of reading achievement at the end of one year.

In another study of attitudes and academic attainment, researchers asked a group of undergraduate college students to teach a sort unit on home and family safety to a 12-year-old boy.[27] Some of the "teachers" were told that the youngster had an I.Q. of 85 and did poorly in school. Others were told that he was a bright student with an I.Q. of 130. When the researchers studied a videotape of the exchange between the teachers and student, they noted very definite behavior patterns in those "teachers" who believed the student had great learning potential.

25. Robert L. Green, "The Effects of Resumed Schooling on the Measured Intelligence of Prince Edward County's Negro Children," *Journal of Negro Children*, Spring 1969.

26. Robert Rosenthal, "The Pygmalion Effect," *Psychology Today*, September, 1973.

27. *Ibid.*

Teachers who thought the child was exceptionally bright most likely greeted him with a cheerful smile, "Hello, Johnny. How are you? We're so glad to be with you." When he stumbled over an answer, the teachers would probably say, "You've got the answer, come on. I know you have the material; I know you have got it." When "Johnny" gave the appropriate response, they would light up, smile and give a sigh of relief because they "knew" he was bright.

This and similar studies have found that teachers show more acceptance, friendliness and support toward "special-potential" students. Other research has shown that teachers frequently react negatively when their "poor" students surprise them with an unexpected correct answer or an unsolicited show of intelligence. Rather than reward these children, teachers often show resentment toward them.[28]

Research studies like these have significant implications for education. Intelligence is not determined at birth but by our environment and our experiences. Research has shown us that most children can learn when they are encouraged to learn. Educators must see that all children are given every opportunity to learn and are encouraged and supported in their day-to-day academic pursuits.

One of the most significant ways in which educational administrators can provide leadership is by providing in-service training programs for staff. Sometimes teachers who have taught for long periods in economically poor communities often see the environment as overwhelming and incompatible with educational success for its children. In-service programs can refresh their outlook and renew their inspiration and dedication. Such programs can also teach them newly developed techniques for overcoming day-to-day problems.

We must not fail to provide our children the best possible education environment. This means providing adequate facilities and classroom materials. It also means dealing with the intangible parts of the environment. It means developing positive attitudes and eliminating negative forces such as racism and insensitivity.

Negative Forces

These negative forces are real in our country today. For example, our present national administration in Washington, D.C., is very insensitive to the needs of minorities and the poor, and this has

28. *Ibid.*

had a negative effect on education. Many National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) fellows, who received federal support early in their graduate programs at Michigan State University, have had difficulty obtaining support during their last two years. Those young people from the black community, who can least afford to borrow, end up borrowing the most to complete their education. Just as blacks in the black communities go to loan agencies and borrow at the highest interest rates, black students working on their Ph.D.s or M.A.s are going to the banks and borrowing at the highest rates to complete their formal education. That is what recent governmental policies have done for us.

We must work against such injustice. We must provide active and strong leadership in order to assist young blacks in acquiring the best that formal education can offer.

From an educational standpoint, we must become advocates for young people. If we fail to seriously look at why young people drop out of school, if we fail to examine alternatives to current public education programs, we will pay the price.

Just two weeks ago, a former graduate student at Michigan State University and a friend of mine, informed me that the minority division of NIMH was currently making funds available for blacks to research the question of black-on-black crime and black-on-black violence. It greatly distressed me that black crime and violence had become such a significant problem that NIMH would find it necessary to initiate such a study.

Last summer, I participated with Marcus Foster in a doctoral seminar at a Florida university. Dr. Foster was in the process of signing a new contract as superintendent of the Oakland School District because he wanted to serve four more years in Oakland to attempt to reverse the poor achievement records of students in the Oakland District. He dismissed the possibility of a professorship at Michigan State University, saying, "I want four more years in Oakland; I need four more years to turn that system around." This month, an assassin's bullet left Marcus Foster's mission unfinished.

The same kind of unnecessary violence cut short the lives of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X. These were men with visions and with the talent, maturity and dedication to make their visions real. We couldn't afford to lose Marcus Foster; we couldn't afford to lose Martin Luther King, Jr.; we couldn't afford to lose Malcolm X, yet we lost them. Leadership in reforming our education system may help us avoid these tragic losses. By reforming our educational programs, we may eliminate the frustration, bitterness, disillusionment, and racial hatred that leads to violence.

Some law enforcement officials feel that an armed group of men and women backed the assassination of Marcus Foster. This group is composed of people who purport to be disillusioned with the establishment's callous and insensitive treatment of the needy and the poor. Marcus Foster was a victim of their disillusionment. Are we going to make our system more responsive to blacks and the poor, or are we going to reap more of the same kind of violence? I feel that the alternative to violence depends on the kind of leadership we as blacks can provide for the total society.

When youngsters drop out of school because they have been led to believe in failure, they become potential assassins. Without an education, they will be without a job and a meaningful place in society. With no other means to satisfy their needs, they will see crime as their only alternative.

The last decade marked a period of unparalleled prosperity and high employment for those 25 years old and above. For those under 25, however, there were fewer jobs. Unemployment for black teenagers reached *one-third*. Poverty pitted against prosperity leads to frustration and frustration to crime and violence.

When poor and underprivileged young people become aggressors, they also become unfortunate victims of an uncaring society. To stop the aggression and save the victims, we must become advocates for young people. We must help them achieve in school and beyond school. We must show them we love them and believe in them. We must also help their families. Teachers or educators who demand higher pay and better benefits must remember that the poor and the jobless have even less than they.

We as blacks must become advocates for the less fortunate—we must become advocates for the least of these.

I am reminded of a scripture my father talked about a great deal in church when I was a youngster. In the book of Matthew, Jesus describes Judgment Day to his disciples:

> Then the King will say to those on his right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom . . . for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was in prison and you came to me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe Thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me."

And that should be our challenge today.